

ST. XAVIER CATHEDRAL

VINCENNES, INDIANA

Knox Co

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HABS NO. 24-7

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District No. 24

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
HERBERT W. FOLTZ, DISTRICT OFFICER
1034 Architects Building, Indianapolis

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Among the very first white men to visit the Piankeshaw Indian village that occupied the site of Vincennes were the devoted missionaries of the Jesuit order of the Catholic church. These consecrated fathers were possessed of a burning zeal to bring Christianity to the members of the savage tribes. The first Catholic church at Vincennes was erected shortly after the settlement of the town. It was a rude structure of logs set perpendicularly in the ground, twenty by sixty feet in size and without windows. Heat was provided by an open fire on the earthen floor, the smoke escaping through a hole in the thatched roof. Rude puncheon benches were used by the worshipers.

This original church stood until removed for the present edifice in 1826. Within its dingy walls Father Pierre Gibault, the patriot priest of the old Northwest, administered to the French inhabitants of the Old Post the oath of allegiance to the cause of American liberty. Before its door Gen. Henry Hamilton surrendered Fort Sackville to Colonel George Rogers Clark on February 25, 1779.

The present church, now nearly a century old, was regarded as the finest building in the state at the time of completion. Its construction called for many sacrifices on the part of loyal members of the parish. The large columns which support the roof are native trees, brought to Vincennes by rafts on the Wabash. Funds for completing the structure were accumulated by the shipment of grain and supplies to New Orleans by flat boats. This was done under the personal direction of the village priest.

The church was ten years in the building.

In 1834 the Diocese of Vincennes was created and this old church was raised to the dignity of a Cathedral. Father Simon Gabriel Brute was consecrated as the first bishop. He and his three immediate successors are buried in the crypt beneath the altar. In the tall slender spire of the Old Cathedral still hangs the small bell that announced to the inhabitants of Vincennes the surrender of England's army to the American forces during the Revolution.

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South of the Cathedral a library and a residence for the parish priests were erected later. On May 6, 1934, the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Diocese of Vincennes will be celebrated with pageantry and liturgical ceremony.

The foregoing brief sketch of Vincennes Cathedral was printed by the Old Post Association, Curtis G. Shake, President. For additional data and information, reference is made to illustrated articles by Kate Milner Rabb and William Herschell appearing respectively in the Indianapolis Sunday Star, March 25, 1934, and the Indianapolis News, April 28, 1934. Copies of both articles are included in the material submitted by District 24.

(Signed)

Herbert H. Coltz
DISTRICT OFFICER

April, 1934

Reviewed 1936 by H.C.F.